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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: TBIO KFLU PREL SOCI CASC EAGR RS

SUBJECT: EMBASSY MOSCOW CONFIRMS TWO CASES OF H1N1 FLU, RUSSIA'S CASES LIKELY UNDERESTIMATED

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY.

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Post has confirmed two cases of H1N1 influenza within the Embassy community. Symptoms have been mild, and both patients are recovering well. Aside from these cases, Russian health authorities have publicly confirmed 12 cases of H1N1 throughout the country. However, this number is almost certainly underestimated. Authorities have not announced contingency plans for a wider outbreak except to speculate that schools might open later in the season. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On July 22, Post received confirmation of two cases of H1N1 influenza within the Embassy community. The Walter Reed Army Institute of Research analyzed samples from the patients and confirmed the H1N1 infection. Both patients' symptoms have been mild, and they are recovering well. On July 24, the Embassy will report its cases to the Federal Service for Consumer Protection and Human Welfare Supervision (Rospotrebnadzor), the Russian government agency responsible for epidemic response.

¶3. (U) On July 21, Dr. Gennadiy Onishchenko, Russia's Chief Medical Officer and head of Rospotrebnadzor, announced that Russia had confirmed a total of 12 cases of H1N1, with several other suspected cases under observation. Onishchenko said that the majority of confirmed cases were in travelers arriving from Spain. He also announced that, because of vacation season and the large number of tourists travelling abroad, authorities expect the virus to spread in the near future. He ordered that in addition to screening arriving passengers on regular airline flights, charter flight passengers would also be subject to screening.

¶4. (SBU) In a July 19 letter to heads of regional Rospotrebnadzor branches, Onishchenko ordered that children's summer camps should report to Rospotrebnadzor any instance in which five or more cases of respiratory illnesses arise at a single camp. According to the letter, every suspected case of H1N1 must be immediately reported to Rospotrebnadzor.

¶5. (SBU) Alexander Kucherenko of Rospotrebnadzor's International Affairs Department told us that each Russian region has individually determined thresholds for different levels of pandemic response. He did not elaborate on what specific measures the agency would take in response to a given rate of infection, nor does the agency specify its contingency plans in its publicly available literature. In his

latest statement, Onishchenko suggested that in the event of a strong rise in infection rates, the government might delay the beginning of the school year. However, he did not define what he meant by "a strong rise."

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: If Russian public health officials have clearly defined contingency plans in the event of a wider H1N1 outbreak, they are not sharing them with the public or with the diplomatic community. We do not know whether the government might restrict travel or impose curfews. Post strongly suspects that authorities are far under-reporting the infection rate, likely because public health officials are directing most attention to inbound travelers from abroad.

BEYRLE